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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWEAN UNIVERSITY PROFILES

1. This cable is the first in a series looking at issues related to higher education in Zimbabwe.

SCENESETTER: EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

2. Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has invested heavily in education, improving the quantity and quality of primary, secondary, and teacher training schools throughout the country. The result was that Zimbabwe achieved the highest literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa and has produced an abundance of highly qualified high school graduates. In an attempt to absorb the growing number of students finishing high school, the flagship University of Zimbabwe expanded its incoming class sizes and eight new public and private universities sprang up in major provincial cities. At least 35,000 students are now enrolled at universities within Zimbabwe, almost 3% of the country's total population of 12 million people.

3. Profiles of the seven most important universities in Zimbabwe follow.

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

4. University of Zimbabwe (www.uz.ac.zw): Located on a spacious campus in Harare, the UZ is Zimbabwe's oldest and largest university. Founded in 1952 as the University of Rhodesia, it became the University of Zimbabwe at independence in 1980. About 18,000 students are enrolled at the university's 10 faculties, which include arts, agriculture, commerce, education, engineering, law, medicine, science, social studies, and veterinary science. UZ houses the country's only law and medical schools and most of the country's accredited graduate programs. Its lecturers tend to be more senior, better researched, and more likely to hold a terminal degree than their colleagues at newer institutions. Annual tuition varies by discipline but is currently around z\$35,000 (US \$26) per year. On-campus housing is available for approximately 5000 students, but students complain regularly about the quality and price of the accommodations. Many are known to "sub-let" their dorm rooms to additional illegal roommates in order to save money. Food service at UZ has been privatized and students are also unhappy with the price and quality of food. Many students say that they can only afford to eat a proper meal once per day and that they survive the rest of the time on tea and "air pies" (imaginary food). Students and staff are frustrated by the university's economic woes, as evidenced by the frequent neglect of routine maintenance on campus and shortages of supplies. In 2002, for example, a final exam in chemistry had to be postponed because the lab could not procure enough test tubes for all students to complete the examination. The University of Zimbabwe is supposed to have two terms per year, with the first term running from March to June and the second from August to November. At present this cycle is off. In February 2003, the Ministry of Higher Education closed UZ indefinitely in response to a strike by academic staff that began in November 2002. Faculty members are seeking a 135% wage increase, not unreasonable given Zimbabwe's inflation rate of 220%. Final exams from December 2002 are still pending and classes have not yet resumed as of April 2003. UZ has traditionally been the most sought after and prestigious of local tertiary institutions, but many top students are now choosing to enroll elsewhere, as they fear that they will never finish a degree at UZ under current conditions.

5. NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (www.nust.ac.zw): Established in 1991 in Zimbabwe's second-largest city, Bulawayo, NUST has become one of

the nation's premier educational institutions. Home to about 2700 students, NUST focuses on the sciences, engineering, architecture, and technological fields. The university administration has adopted a philosophy of growing incrementally and stressing quality over quantity, both in terms of the number of buildings erected on its still-in-progress campus or when adding new subjects. NUST was the first university in Zimbabwe to require an industrial attachment (internship) for all of its students in order to graduate. This was part of a strategy to foster ties with industry and to prepare students with practical skills that they will need on the job. Tuition at NUST is around z\$36,000 per year and it operates on the American academic calendar of two semesters beginning in August and January. Fewer than 100 students are able to live on-campus, as most of the planned residence halls have not yet been built. Because of Zimbabwe's fuel crisis, students and staff alike have at times struggled to get to the NUST campus, located about 5 km outside of the Bulawayo city center. NUST lecturers also went on strike in November 2002 seeking a 135% salary increase. Classes were curtailed at the end of 2002 and final exams postponed, but most of the academic staff is back at work and classes are meeting again as of April 2003. The salary issue has yet to be resolved though, so the threat of another strike still hangs in the air.

16. Bindura University of Science Education (www.buse.ac.zw): Bindura became a university in 2000, but its roots lie in a teacher-training institute that for many years was supported heavily by Cuban funding and personnel. Located in a small town about 100 km north of Harare, Bindura now has about 600 students who pay about z\$35,000 per year in tuition and fees. The school has two terms per year, with the first running from March to June and the second from August to December. As its name implies, Bindura specializes in training teachers in biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics, and environmental science. Most Bindura students already have certificates from teacher training colleges and several years experience in the classroom and are now returning for a university degree. Bindura is hampered by its small campus and lack of physical and material resources. Its library is tiny, there are few computers available for student use, and lab facilities are inadequate. Students in lab science courses now travel as necessary to Harare and use University of Zimbabwe lab facilities. Bindura has a long-term plan to build a new campus nearby, but lack of funds has so far hindered the start of any construction. Bindura faculty members have not joined the strike started by their colleagues at NUST and UZ and classes are proceeding normally.

17. Midlands State University: Located in Gweru, a mid-sized town about 300 kilometers southwest of Harare, Midlands State (MSU) only became a university in 2000. It has grown quickly and already has 4700 students, second in size only to the University of Zimbabwe. MSU is following the typical Zimbabwean academic calendar, opening the school year in March and beginning a second term in August. Students pay tuition of approximately z\$35,000. Midlands offers a wide range of subjects, including agriculture, commerce, and social studies. Facilities are inadequate for the size of the current student body and the subjects being offered. MSU has plans to build its own campus, but no ground has yet been broken, so classes are held on the grounds of the former Midlands Teacher Training College. Academics at MSU tend to be younger and less experienced than their UZ or NUST counterparts. They have not gone on strike or threatened to do so, and classes at MSU are proceeding as scheduled.

18. Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU): ZOU boasts an enrollment of almost 10,000 and offers a variety of subjects, perhaps the most popular of which are business, education, agriculture, and communications. Tuition varies by subject but the average is about z\$33,000 per year. Most ZOU students are working adults, many of them teachers in rural areas, seeking job advancement or a salary increase through a university degree. ZOU is however better described as a correspondence school than a full-fledged university. Instruction takes place through written self-study modules supplemented by occasional in-person meetings for tutorials and exams. ZOU's degree completion rate is quite low and its degrees, though accredited, are not as well respected as those from other local universities.

PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

9. Africa University (www.africau.edu): Africa University (AU) is a private school located 15 kilometers west of Mutare, Zimbabwe's third-largest city. It opened in 1992 and is affiliated with and financially supported by the American United Methodist Church. As its name implies, the campus hosts students from 20 countries across Africa. There are currently about 1000 students enrolled and about 70 lecturers working in faculties of agriculture, education, management, and theology. AU has a modern campus, a first-class library and, on the whole, greater resources than other universities in Zimbabwe. AU follows the American academic calendar with semesters starting in August and January. Tuition and fees per term for international students are US\$2680, while local residents pay about z\$150,000 (US \$110). Africa University is a functional and growing university with a diverse student body and staff complement. It is however, financially out of reach for most Zimbabweans.

10. SOLUSI UNIVERSITY: Solusi University is a Seventh Day Adventist school with a student body of 1200. It is located in a rural area about 100 kilometers outside of Bulawayo. Students may choose to study in the faculty of arts and sciences, business, or theology and religious studies. Solusi follows the American academic calendar. Tuition and fees per semester are z\$249,00 (US \$185) for Zimbabweans and US\$1390 for foreigners. The Government of Zimbabwe recognized Solusi as an independent degree-granting entity in 1994. Prior to that date, Solusi students received degrees from Andrews University, another Adventist college located in Michigan. The degree program with Andrews was phased out by 1998, but a special relationship still exists between the two schools, which includes material assistance, staff development, and faculty exchange.

Other Institutions

11. The Government of Zimbabwe plans to create two more fully-fledged universities in the provincial towns of Masvingo and Chinoyi. In addition, Zimbabwe has a network of smaller diploma-granting tertiary institutions across the country, including polytechnic institutes, nursing colleges, and teacher training colleges. These schools can best be compared to community colleges or vocational schools in the United States, as they cannot grant university degrees but rather provide practical training and job skills for particular trades.

SULLIVAN